

Mishlei 20-17

Sweetness

Key Concepts

When you taste something sweet, you are inclined to want more of it. After all, if it is sweet, it must be good. But when you think about it, you realize that sweetness can be misleading. Sweet things may taste good, but they can be bad for your teeth and for your health.

That is why getting rich may seem sweet, but it can cause you all kinds of problems. Mishlei warns you that if you are tempted to get rich by dishonest means you will find that the consequences are more than you bargained for and that what seemed sweet is actually bitter.

Exploring Mishlei

(יז) עֲרֵב לְאִישׁ לֶחֶם שֶׁקֶר וְאַחַר יִמְלֵא פִּיהוּ חֲצָץ:

(17) Bread of falsehood is sweet to a man,

but afterwards his mouth will be filled with gravel.

Mishlei describes dishonest practices as the bread of falsehood. Bread symbolizes a basic food that we all need, but when bread seems sweet to you, it is time to watch out. You may be eating more than is good for you and you may be fooling yourself.

Similarly, deceptive practices may seem sweet, because you can fool people and get away with easy profit. But if you stop and think, you will realize that what seemed sweet is just the opposite. You are likely to find your mouth filled with the taste of gravel.

Learning Mishlei

(17) Tasting sweet to a man — עֲרֵב לְאִישׁ

is the bread of falsehood. — לֶחֶם שֶׁקֶר

But afterwards — וְאַחַר,

his mouth will be filled — יִמְלֵא פִּיהוּ

with gravel. — חֲצָץ

Additional Insights

[1] When flour is sold at a low price, the reason may be that it has been adulterated with sand and pebbles. The customer who doesn't examine the flour too closely may think he is getting a "sweet" bargain. But later, once he tastes the bread made from that flour, he realizes that his bargain is a complete loss, which even damages his teeth. (ילקוט מעם לועז)

[2] A person gets carried away with the sweetness of sin and even though he realizes there are consequences, he suppresses that thought in order to indulge himself with the momentary pleasure. (רבינו יונה)